



Dr. Nena Bowman, board-certified toxicologist, managing director of the Tennessee Poison Control Center and adjunct professor in toxicology at Lipscomb's College of Pharmacy.

## Esteemed professor's legacy lives on at Lipscomb through protégé

**May 2014 should have been a time of unsullied joy for Dr. Nena Bowman as she graduated from Lipscomb with her Pharm.D. Her hard work had paid off, and she was looking forward to starting a new chapter of her life as a toxicology fellow.**

With her accomplishments, however, came sadness as her mentor, **Dr. Kim Barker** ('89), then an associate professor of pharmacy practice at the College of Pharmacy and a certified poison specialist with the Tennessee Poison Center, unexpectedly passed away.

Barker introduced Bowman to toxicology through her elective course at Lipscomb. When Bowman showed interest in the field, Barker began nurturing Bowman's interest through in-person meetings, email and phone conversations, and even late night text messages guiding her in applying for and acquiring her fellowship in toxicology. Bowman was on her way to following in her mentor's footsteps, and she and Barker had big plans for the future.

There had been a defining moment during Bowman's fourth year rotation. She was still wrestling with whether or not to enter the toxicology field when she was assigned to work the phones with Barker on that particular day, answering questions from patients, doctors and other health care providers. Bowman recalls feeling extremely nervous, and

did not feel up to the task, especially she said, when she got an emergency call from a hospital.

Barker took over that call and provided advice and instructions with such calm and finesse, that Bowman was awed. “At that moment, I knew this is what I wanted to do. I wanted to be that voice of calm in a stressful situation. I wanted to be just like Dr. Barker,” she said.

Bowman applied to four of only eight toxicology fellowship programs in the U.S. Barker wrote her recommendation letters and spent her personal time after class coaching Bowman and refining her interview skills.

Barker succumbed to complications related to a medical condition shortly after Bowman accepted the fellow position with the Utah Poison Control Center. Bowman was devastated. Her mentor, friend, teacher and role model was gone.

Barker was an incredible resource for Lipscomb student pharmacists and faculty, and also for preceptors and medical professionals all throughout the nation. As one of only 80 Pharm.D.s in the world also certified by the American Board of Applied Toxicology, Barker worked as managing director for many years at the Tennessee Poison Center and her wealth of knowledge was a true asset for the medical profession.

Bowman finished her fellowship in 2016 and passed the ABAT board exam in September becoming, like Barker, one of the few ABAT-certified Pharm.D. toxicologists in America. In July, Bowman started at the Tennessee Poison Center as the managing director and as an adjunct professor at Lipscomb to teach toxicology, similar to the position Barker held during her final tenure.

“When I moved to Utah, I told myself, ‘There is only one job I would move back to Tennessee for, and it’s amazing how that one job worked out,’ said Bowman. “I like to think that Kim sees what I’m doing and is helping things to work out.

“It means a lot to be back and able to make sure the good work she was doing keeps moving forward. I want to positively impact students’ lives and pharmacy education in the same way that Kim impacted mine,” Bowman said.

Barker had played an integral role in the pharmacy education program at Lipscomb. She implemented a practice seminar course for all third-year student pharmacists where she led students to prepare and present a clinical presentation based on primary literature, evaluated studies and writing objectives that brought together their skills from core course work in pharmacy practice and pharmaceutical sciences.

“This course, according to current students and alumni, was one of the most difficult aspects of their pharmacy education, but also one of the most applicable and beneficial,” said **Dean Roger Davis**. “Barker’s rigor and desire for perfection pushed student pharmacists to learn and be prepared for all situations.”

“She was really the mentor that I needed,” said Bowman, a Lewisburg, Tennessee, native who got into pharmacy after working at Kroger during her undergraduate years at Middle Tennessee State University. “She was very nurturing and pushed me to be better. Some mentors push you



(l to r) Dr. Nena Bowman, Dr. Kim Barker, and fellow College of Pharmacy graduate Dr. Elizabeth Cherry.

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too hard, and others not hard enough, but she was the perfect balance. She was the person you could count on to tell you when you were doing something wrong and immediately turn around and help you figure out the best solution.”

After Barker’s death, when Bowman had finished her fellowship and was snowed under preparing for the board certification exam, she said she often thought back to that day in the poison center, when Barker deftly handled the emergency with calm and precision. “It reminded me how much I wanted to be like her, and how much I wanted to be certified. I wanted to make her proud.”

With so few certified toxicologists across the nation, few pharmacy programs are able to have one on staff, Bowman said. The study of toxicology is valuable for student pharmacists as they are often the first ones to interact with a patient experiencing harmful effects, she added.

“Pharmacists are often the first-line defenders,” she said.

Today, Bowman is the managing director of the state’s poison control center, teaches at Lipscomb, manages calls in the call center, and carries out public education on medication safety and potential toxic threats that can be avoided, such as carbon monoxide poisoning and potential bioterrorism events.

She also conducts toxicology research and works with students in the Lipscomb Drug Information Center, which provides information for health care providers in the region.

“It has been a tough road without Dr. Barker. There are often days I wish I could hug her and thank her one more time for being such a positive, nurturing light in my life,” said Bowman.